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### Feature: Living in a smart world

English.news.cn 2013-06-20 16:21:25



by Tiffany Hoy

SYDNEY, June 20 (Xinhua) -- As former CIA whistle-blower Edward Snowden hides out in Hong Kong over the expose of U.S. government data mining, technology experts say we must prepare for the fallout of our plugged-in, wired-up world.

While today's technology promises to make our lives easier, linking us together and putting vast amounts of information at the user's fingertips, many of us are generating data without any real idea of where it's going or how it may be used.

Speaking at the University of Sydney last week, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange commented on the pervasiveness of technology in our everyday lives, and how data is now collected on every single person plugged into the system -- regardless of whether they've ever committed a crime, or been innocent or guilty.

"Edward Snowden revealed something that I have been speaking about for a long time... That as the Internet has penetrated every aspect of society, riding on with it is mass surveillance," Assange said.

"The Internet has been transformed into a militarily occupied space. This transformation has come about silently because those who know what is going on in the global surveillance industry have no incentives to speak out," he added.

If we're not careful, said Assange, mass data collection and surveillance is "going to rip out the most important and cherished aspects of our freedom in this new world that we have been transforming."

As "smart" devices continue to advance, government regulation is lagging far behind, leaving citizens vulnerable to giving away their private information without their knowledge, said Katina Michael, vice chair of the Australian Privacy Foundation.

People sometimes don't even know what embedded sensors are in the devices that they're carrying, Michael said, but the information that they record can be pieced together to create a frightening surveillance profile.

"There are many social implications if I know your whereabouts 24 x 7. I can track your location history, for example -- I know exactly where you were on the Earth's surface, I know how fast you were traveling which tells me your mode of transport, if any, and I'm probably able to infer what you were doing," said Michael.

"If I know through the devices that you're carrying: who you are -- through your ID, where you are -- through GPS or wifi enablement, when you were there -- through a timestamp, and what you were doing -- through the visual imagery you are taking photos or records of, then we pretty much know what is actually in your mind," she added.

Moving towards a more transparent society, where mobile recording devices can be used to capture what's happening at any given time -- with life-bloggers recording every waking moment through autography devices, and police use dashboard cameras and headsets to record video later used as evidence in court, also comes with a trade-off: the erosion of personal privacy.

"There's an asymmetry involved here. The wearer of these wearable devices is always a more

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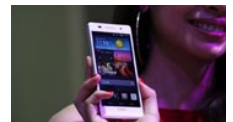
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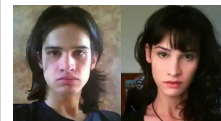
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There's an asymmetry involved here. The wearers of these wearable devices is always a more powerful constituent in this relationship. Those individuals who choose not to be a part of this new information society may find themselves on the wrong side of any particular imbalance," Michael said.

"The asymmetry gets greater and greater as the number of devices grow, (between) those that have wearables and those who don't, and those who don't wish to participate and live off-grid.

"Yes we understand that once we step out our front door we can't expect privacy. But private things can be gathered, such as the clothes that we wear, the places that we frequent, if I want to go to a religious building on a weekend ... I should have an expectation of privacy and there should not be recordings of me going about my everyday life," she added.

Rob Manson, CEO of Augmented Reality content creation platform buildAR, said devices were increasingly enabling people to use sensors to motivate or change their behavior; such as a smart phone app that connects to your toothbrush to encourage better oral hygiene habits.

But the feeling of being watched can also change people's behaviors, called the "observer effect".

"You may be able to change people's behavior and convert their likes and dislikes just by videoing and recording them as they go about their business in everyday life," said Michael.

The collection of all this data could be of great benefit to society through research, said Susannah Sabine, affiliate member of the Society of the Social Implications of Technology, but the information must be gathered in the right circumstances.

To be useful in a research context, data needs to be properly described, uniquely identified and cited, so that everyone who participated in its generation can be acknowledged, and come with an authorization of how it can be used -- perhaps through Creative Commons licensing, said Sabine.

So far, the Australian government has left the rules around data collection largely to industry self-regulation, said Michael, but policies need to be enforced, and they must apply to both citizens and authorities.

The overall message: until government regulation catches up and better global security measures for protecting information are in place, be careful of the data you're producing, the personal details you release.

"(These technologies are) there to enable us to capture recordings, look after things on the Internet, share things with our social network in a convenient manner," said Michael.

"But in fact, what we might find is that this convenience actually becomes a form of control. And we lose control through that which we gather through us day-to-day. We've become quite obsessed with technology.

"There's a personal price we're paying for these technologies that are becoming closer to the human interface -- we all know what the benefits are, we acknowledge those benefits, but there needs to be a greater awareness of the risks," she added.

Editor: Wang Yuanyuan



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